

**LECTURE, DELIVERED BY DR. PRENTISS, AT THE OPENING OF THE TRAINING SCHOOL FOR NURSES IN WASHINGTON.**

The following lecture was received from a friend in Washington, with the request that we publish it for the benefit of our readers:

*Ladies and Gentlemen:*—This school is now in the fifth year of its existence, and has already taken its place among the permanent institutions of the kind in the land.

We may assume that its success is assured. Its object is to fill an urgent want in the community, to elevate the standard of nursing both by giving voice to the necessity of greater skill and knowledge in caring for the sick; and by supplying the want practically.

We propose to show the people the need of educated nurses and their superiority, to elevate the business of nursing to the standard of a profession, and having stimulated the demand, to supply it in the persons of trained nurses.

We are all of us familiar with the lamentable shortcomings of the so-called "professional nurses" in this city up to a very recent period; not that there were not within our borders many estimable nurses. For the credit of the sex I am glad to say that a few good nurses could always be found—women of intelligence and natural capacity, who love the calling for the good they are able to render their fellow beings, and who are respected and loved by all whom they serve. Add to such a one the training which we aim to give, and we have the model to which we aspire.

But up to a few years ago for one such would be found nine to whom to apply the sacred name of nurse was a mockery. They are found to be mostly aged women, passed the age of sixty years, who being left with no means of support, turn to caring for the sick as a last resort. Too old to bear well the labors and fatigues and loss of rest which devolve upon the office. Only too apt to be querulous and set in certain notions, they are a positive detriment to the patient.

Old colored "mammies," also, full of superstition and ignorance, relating tales of all the horrible cases they have nursed, add their share of injury to the suffering victims who fall under their hands.

Florence Nightengale in a volume entitled, "Notes on Nursing" appropriately remarks: "It seems a commonly received idea among men, and even among women themselves, that it requires nothing but a disappointment in love, the want of occupation, a general disgust or incapacity for other things, to turn a woman into a good nurse. It reminds one of the parish where a stupid old man was set up to be school-master because he was past keeping pigs."

It must not be supposed that I have any harsh or unkind feelings toward such unfortunates as are included in these classes, more especially to elderly females thrown on their own resources. I respect them all the more that they wish to do something for their own support, and would favor any project by which proper employment might be thrown in their way. But have we a right, from motives of benevolence to the deserving poor, to place our sick at the mercy of their ignorance. Surely the innocent suffering child, the invalid mother or sister, or the father so strong in health so feeble and helpless when stricken by disease, deserve better at our hands than this. Better, far better contribute directly to the support of those who enlist our sympathies, and furnish to the loved ones in the times of trial, of suffering and perhaps of death, the best attention that educated skill can bestow. Then if the shadow of the dark valley falls upon the household, we will have no occasion to reproach ourselves with vain regrets for what might have been. Said a lady, convalescing from typhoid fever a short time since to her nurse: "If I had known what you know, or what I know now, I believe my son might have recovered." Her son, from whom she had contracted the fever, had died of the disease, and, too late, she appreciated that he had not had such care as she experienced.

One of the results of an institution for the education of nurses in any community is the development in that community of a better understanding of the real wants of the sick, of the true duties of the nurse and of her proper position in society. It starts people to thinking, even those who never come within the direct range of its teachings.

The casual mention of the school in the newspapers, or in conversation, or the meeting of one of its nurses in the sick room, so far above the traditional idea of a "Sarah Gamp," a quiet moving lady, with lady-like manners. All these things are like seed sown broadcast; many find a favorable soil and bear fruit an hundred fold. The fact is impressed upon the people that there are nurses and nurses, that some are scholars, and when sickness comes to a loved one, this fact becomes clothed with a value which it had not before.

Already the demand for the educated and refined for nurses is felt in this community, and the supply is not sufficient to meet it. Thus the influence of this movement is far reaching—not confined within the narrow borders of our own members—but it stretches out to the entire community, instructing, elevating, I had almost said civilizing. Indeed the influence of the "Washington Training School for Nurses" is not limited to the District of Columbia, but, through the instrumentality of the efficient Board of Education, it has been felt in common with that of other schools of a similar character all over the United States.

That there has been need of missionary work in this direction, I think none who have considered the subject will deny. About three years ago a physician of this city, and a prominent one, too, asked me to recommend him to a nurse, but said he: "I don't want any of your trained nurses. I prefer an old colored granny any time, and the less she knows the better." You must not suppose this gentleman was lacking in intelligence, although it would appear so to a stranger. No, but he was afraid of a nurse who knew "too much," that she would usurp the office of the physician and interfere with his treatment. In other words, he thought his patient would be better off without nursing, than in the hands of one who would be meddling. We in the school know how unfounded is such a fear, for interference with the physician is taught to be an unpardonable sin in nursing. I have mentioned this incident because it illustrates

what were formerly the views of quite a large class in the community, a class which, in the sunshine of increased knowledge, is year by year dwindling away. This gentleman himself, I am happy to say, has since materially modified his views. So far from agreeing with the proposition that a sick person is better off in the hands of an inefficient nurse, because, she does not conflict with the physician, I should be almost inclined to take the reverse as true, namely, that the patient would fare better in the hands of an educated, intelligent nurse, without a doctor holding such views than with such a doctor and no nurse. But the acme of professional skill is reached when the services of a good physician and a good nurse are combined.

It is a fact not generally known that nine cases of disease out of ten would recover spontaneously, that is under ordinary care and attention without other treatment.

The natural tendency of disease is to recover; or rather I should put it, while the tendency of all disease is to death, the powers of nature are usually the stronger and recovery follows.

Perhaps some of my professional brethren will consider it unorthodox to give expression to such views. I think the public should know such facts. A proper appreciation by the people of the true relation between the functions of the physician and the diseases he treats would be to the advantage of all parties.

It is a difficult matter to dissipate the clouds of superstition and ignorance which surround the subject of diseases and their management, even in the minds of those otherwise most enlightened.

In spite of the advanced civilization of the times a very large number of people, perhaps I might safely say the majority continue to grasp after the marvelous in medicine and cease not to look forward to the discovery of specific remedies.

Indeed it is part of the creed of a class of so called physicians, that there is in nature an antidote for every disease, and in the millenium of physic, such will be known and the demon of disease be trampled under foot. It is this faith which is taken advantage of by the venders of "Patent Medicine," who flood the country with their vile compounds, doing injury to hundreds for one that is benefited.

It is a legitimate hope that ultimately the means of protecting ourselves from the ravages of sickness will be discovered, but it will not be through the agency of hap hazard experiment. Rather by the study and observance of nature's laws may we expect to avoid the consequences following their violation, for we all know that many maladies are the direct result of incorrect living and unsanitary surroundings. Also by the study and observance of disease itself to ascertain its true nature, of which in reality but little is now known. We know its effects, the symptoms, duration, changes, its effects in the system and often the causes, but of the "true inwardness" of its subtle essence very much remains undiscovered. It is in these directions that we are to look for the means of over-throwing the great enemies of human life, and not by blind groping in the dark after individual drugs. Practically the truth of the matter is that the number of specific remedies, that is remedies capable of curing disease absolutely and outright is very small. The true function of the physician is to assist nature and guide his patient through the dangers and complications of the attack to a speedy recovery.

What would you think of a general who when ordered to lead his army over the mountains would pompously claim the power of annihilating natural laws, and like Alladin with his wonderful lamp, take them up bodily and set them down on the other side? It is not done that way now-a-days. He must study his route, know the rivers and mountain passes and he is the best general who conducts his troops over the line of march with the least expenditure of time, labor and material.

He is the best physician who keeps these ideas continually in mind, and brings to bear upon his cases all his knowledge of the science of medicine; and she is the best nurse who has the judgment, the education and the aptitude to interpret truly the book of nature laid open to her. With such a doctor to control and direct, and such a nurse to execute his instructions, the acme of skill in the treatment of disease is reached.

When the shadow of illness falls upon the household none but the most callous hearted can look on without fear and anxiety as to the result. The most anxious of all persons when sickness comes to their families, are the physicians themselves, for they know and appreciate to the full, the dangers and possibilities of even apparently trivial complaints. They of all others are most desirous of securing the services of the best nurse to be obtained. It only needs that a thoroughly competent nurse be observed once in the discharge of her duties to convince the most sceptical of her immense superiority over the ordinary nurse or over the best intended efforts of interested friends. Said a young lady suffering from an attack of acute fever recently, to her father, a physician, "Oh, Papa, I am so glad you brought her, (the nurse) she rests me so." And again after a couple of days she said, "Papa, I didn't know anyone could be so quick and yet so quiet, she seems to know what I want before I ask and has it ready almost before I am done speaking." Need I say that this young lady fell in love with her nurse. The presence of the nurse rested her. That expresses it exactly. She knew she was in safe hands; that all was being done for her without care or thought on her part, and she rested.

We have thus far spoken only of the gentler sex in connection with this subject; indeed our school only contemplate the education of females.

The same remarks, however, apply with still greater force to male nurses, except that they are fewer in number and not in as great demand. Still cases are continually occurring in which the services of male nurses are imperatively demanded, cases in which the duties required could scarcely be performed by a female, such as the care of many surgical patients, of delirious, tremens, insanity or the like.

The number of men in any community, who give their attention to nursing are few, and hard to find, and when found are usually worse almost than useless. So far as I know there are no special training schools for this class, the only source which can be drawn upon for their production, being hospitals where they pick

up a little knowledge as convalescent patients, and afterwards follow the calling from inability to earn a living in any other way.

The need of giving special training to men who propose to give their service to the care of the sick, may be inferred from a remark by the celebrated surgeon, Dr. Gross in an address delivered before the American Medical Association in 1869. He said "male nurses are every where bad and incompetent. Drunkenness and male nursing are almost synonymous terms in the experience of the American physician." My limited experience coincides with this sentiment. In this district I know of but a single male nurse with whom I would dare trust a patient.

Although the subject is foreign to the immediate object of this gathering it is hoped that in time it too will receive attention.

The proposed establishment of a new general hospital in this city opens up an opportunity for the training of both male and female nurses, which it is believed will be properly utilized. I think, perhaps, that the generally received idea that nursing should be confined to the gentler sex, is not altogether well founded. True, the lords of creation rather look down upon such employment as beneath their dignity, but my private opinion is that a little knowledge in this direction would do them no harm. A man is liable to be called upon at any time to render kindly offices to those dear to him in hours of trial, and knowing how to act aright would not come amiss. Some of the best nurses I ever saw were affectionate husbands or loving sons, developed through love and necessity.

The importance of such knowledge to the father of the family, also is usually under estimated. There is a tradition among the Benedicts, how true, of course, I do not know, that papa is sometimes called upon to take up a midnight march in, well not full evening dress to the tune of the sweet bye-bye. Tradition further has it that this kind of drill is more in vogue in the earlier days of married felicity, during the reign of "Mother-in-law," before having attained to the dignity of club and lodge meetings. Later in life he knows he is a lord of creation, and spurns such menial duties. He must support the family, and cannot be disturbed of his rest at night. His prerogative to discuss politics at the corner grocery, and to vote, unless he live in the district of Columbia.

In all seriousness, however, there can be no doubt of the advantage which would result from a greater knowledge of the needs and demands of the sick, on the part of men. Those who are heads of families, who are teachers in colleges and schools, pastors of churches, law makers, judges, doctors, all of these exert a powerful influence in the community as well as in their own family circles. The support of this movement, which has for its object the elevation of the standard of nursing, must come, in fact, has come to a large extent from these classes.

The officers and trustees of the school are honest and earnest in their endeavors to advance the cause of this beneficent work, but without the support of the community they could not succeed. We are proud to say that support has not been found lacking, and that our school is a success.

There is one other subject, or perhaps I should say two, to which I wish to refer this evening. I shall be brief and not tax your patience for many minutes longer. The subjects I refer to are, "A Nurses Home," and a "Nurses' Directory." In the catalogues distributed here to-night, on page five you will find the following statement: "The perfecting of our plans would require much greater facilities than at present exist in Washington. A nurse's home would be required and a lady superintendent, whose duty it would be to act as matron and manager of the home, and guide and instructress to the pupils residing within its walls.

The nurses would reside in this home when off duty, and a headquarters for trained nurses would thereby become established. Physicians and private families, or strangers could find them—trained, skilled nurses—upon application.

Speaking for myself, it seems to me the time has come when the project here outlined should be carried out.

Thanks to the energetic ladies who conducted the Art Loan Exhibition and the Martha Washington Tea Parties, the society is now in possession of sufficient funds to start a "home" on a modern scale, and support it for one year.

A suitable house should be rented in a central neighborhood, which might be done at a moderate rental. A matron selected from the pupils of the school would be placed in charge. The parlor would be reception room, place of meeting for the trustees, lecture room for the classes and office for the matron. The sleeping apartments not otherwise assigned, could be rented to nurses who would find it to their advantage to be associated with the home. The matron could also furnish board to such nurses as might be disengaged. Over the door would be "Nurses' Home" and being identified with the Washington Training School, it would give us a local habitation and a name. This plan seems to me to be perfectly feasible. It would bring all the meetings of the school under one roof, and thus save a considerable sum of which is now paid for rent of Lecture Hall.

One thing is certain, if a nurses' home were established, it would show the public that this movement is something tangible and would be a more powerful appeal to public countenance and support than bushels of circulars and manifestos. Already we have offers of contributions to help in the furnishing, and without doubt would have others when the project is definitely determined upon.

As to the means looked to for the continued support, it is believed that the enterprises, especially if connected with a "Directory" would be very nearly self-supporting; but it must be remembered that this is a charitable undertaking throughout and is truly for the public benefit. The trustees, officers, and lecture faculty contribute their services freely, and to the people who will reap the profit, they look for encouragement.

Upon page seven of the circular is found the following paragraph:

"When it is known that the instruction in this school is given free to all those who possess the requisite qualifications, and who desire to become trained nurses, and that the annual contribution for member-

ship is only one dollar, it is not unreasonable to expect that this district would afford a list of at least three thousand contributing members."

The present membership is about 300, which it is very desirable should be increased. All of us here this evening, interested in this cause, should make it a personal matter to secure as many contributing members to the society as possible. Each of us surely can influence at least one friend to join in the good work.

Now for a few words about the second subject, namely, a "Nurses' Directory." By this we mean the establishment of an office where a book will be kept in which all properly recommended nurses may be registered. They will be required to keep the office informed of their engagements, and when disengaged, so that the secretary may know to a certainty when a nurse can be obtained at any given time. It will be the object of the Directory also to keep a record of the qualities and efficiency of their nurses, which will of itself be a stimulant to good services.

The advantages and conveniences which such an arrangement, to those needing the services of a nurse would be, cannot be overestimated. This is specially true of strangers, and of cases of sudden illness, which will brook no delay.

It would also be a great convenience to physicians, and relieve them of a serious responsibility, for it is to the doctor that the patient looks to find him a nurse.

Only last week a case occurred to me which illustrates the point. I was called to a patient—a child suffering from a violent illness—which required constant and careful nursing. Knowing that however willing the mother was, it was impossible for her to give the required attention, both night and day, I recommended the employment of a nurse. I gave the addresses of several; but it was only after calling upon eight and losing twenty-four hours of time, that one was finally procured.

Other doctors continually make the same complaint. I am frequently called upon, on account of my connection with this school, by other physicians, to recommend a nurse, and I find the same difficulty. Although I have the addresses of many, I never know whether they are engaged or not and much valuable time is lost in consequence. With such a Directory as is proposed, definite information would be obtained at once. These directories are already in operation in Boston, Philadelphia and Cincinnati, and are spoken of in the highest terms both by physicians and the people.

I have here the circulars of a Philadelphia directory, which give an insight to the objects and operations of the office. I think they are of sufficient interest to read extracts from them.

**CIRCULARS.**

The first circular is addressed to physicians, and after setting forth the difficulties under which physicians labor in obtaining competent nurses, explains the plan of the directory for nurses and appeals to the medical profession to forward its objects.

The second circular is addressed to nurses, and explains to them its objects and gives information as to what is expected of them and makes suggestions as to prices, etc.

The third circular states that such nurses will be registered who are recommended by physicians in good standing, or who are graduates of recognized training schools. It also gives the blank form to be filled out in making application for registration; stating name, age, residence, experience in nursing, in what public institution, if any, if a graduate of a training school, name and date of diploma, branch of nursing preferred, whether contagious diseases will be nursed, charges for nursing, physicians referred to, three in number, and also names and addresses of three families nursed in during the past two years.

Next comes the circular of inquiry to the physicians referred to, as to the qualifications, capabilities, and faults of the nurse. After a nurse has registered and has obtained employment through the directory, another circular of inquiry is sent to the physician of the patient she has nursed, asking as to her efficiency, etc, and also a similar circular to the family; the answers to both to be confidential. A record is thus kept at the office of the directory, and such nurses as are found to be grossly incompetent are dropped from the roll.

In Philadelphia the directory was started under the auspices of the College of Physicians, and the circulars are signed by three of the most prominent physicians of that city as a committee, namely, Dr. W. W. Keene, Dr. Albert H. Smith, Dr. S. Weir Mitchell, Comm. of the Col. of Physicians.

The Boston Directory has been established three years and meets with such favor that it is not only self-supporting, but actually yields an income.

The nurses pay a small fee for the privilege of registration, and those requiring their services a fee for the information in regard to them. In this city it seems to me peculiarly appropriate to establish a nurses' directory under the auspices of the Training School and in connection with a Nurses' Home. It is essential to its success that some person should act as secretary who would be ready to answer calls at all hours. The matron residing at the Home would always be on hand and could combine the duties of both offices. The two institutions would work together in harmony and be mutually advantageous. Nothing seems to me more natural than that the Nurses' Directory should have its office at the Nurses' Home.

Much more might be said on the subject of this useful enterprise; but I fear I have already trespassed upon your patience to an unwarrantable degree.

In bringing this address to a close I will mention that the subject of trained nurses is one of increasing interest all over our land. At the Bureau of Education constant inquiries are received upon the subject and a special circular has been prepared to answer them.

In the last number of a well known monthly magazine, *The Century*, is an excellent popular article upon this subject.

Speaking for the trustees and officers of the Washington Training School, I can say that we have every reason to be encouraged at its success.

I thank you, ladies and gentlemen for your kind attention.

Premature grayness avoided by using Parker's Hair Balsam, distinguished for its cleanliness and perfume. 25ml.

